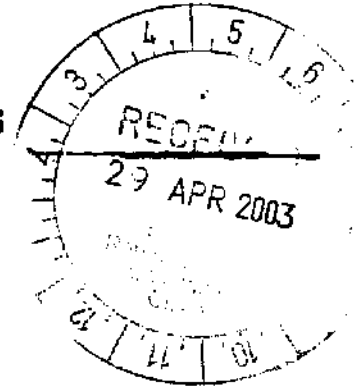


**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES**



24 April 2003

Submission No.56

Dear Sir

As a long-time Tawonga resident and a former Country Fire Authority member I feel compelled to contribute to the Federal Government's bushfire review. I place my faith in the Committee taking those necessary steps required to ensure our country's future forest management policies and procedures make certain we do not have a repeat of this summer's bushfire crisis.

I feel it is imperative that the following two points are made:

- The 2003 summer bushfire crisis in North-East Victoria could have been prevented had the State Government enacted correct forest management and fuel reduction policies.
- The Victorian State Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria managed these fires poorly and should shoulder some of the blame for the devastation these fires caused.

Fuel reduction burning in the Bogong National Park in North-East Victoria has never been conducted and there is little doubt that had back-burning occurred and had stock been permitted to graze in the park, substantially less of the parklands would have been ravaged by these fires.

I graze 110 adult cattle in the Bogong National Park and I can attest that the grassland area of this park where the cattle graze was only minimally burnt. In contrast, areas of parkland where Parks Victoria prohibit cattle and where the State Government has failed to conduct fuel reduction burning and has allowed the forest floor material accumulate, were destroyed by these lethal fires.

I would estimate that 65% of my run at Bogong National Park is overgrown and inaccessible to my cattle and this area was utterly destroyed by the fires. A mere 5% of the remaining part of my run where cattle can be grazed was only slightly affected by these fires.

The fire spotted onto my cattle run at 10.50am on Tuesday 21st of January. The Klewa Hydra Power Company had workers on site by 12-noon. They requested an aeroplane from the DSE base at Dinner Plain to extinguish this fire. DSE refused their request and ultimately the Southern Catchment adjacent to Rocky Valley Dam was destroyed. This fire eventually extinguished itself and luckily the moss beds were not affected. Had the moss beds caught alight it is not unthinkable that they would still be burning today.

Our area has been deeply scarred by the fires and they continue to have a great effect on our local tourism industry and businesses.

One of many examples is the destruction of the Old Roper Hut on Dugan Spur. This is an important stop for workers travelling from Mt Bogong to Mt Natham and I believe steps should be taken to rebuild this hut.

The Mount Beauty Timber Mill closed prior to Christmas due to a lack of timber, this meant that at least thirty local jobs were lost. It would be a terrible shame if this mill were not permitted to process the burnt mountain ash from the fires.

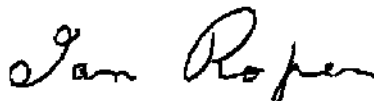
Many comparisons have been made between these fires and those of 1939, however such comparisons are unjust and preposterous, primarily because the weather conditions leading up to the 1939 fires were substantially different.

As I have stated, the intensity and magnitude of the 2003 fires could have been prevented and the devastation of these fires would not have been as great had the Victorian State Government practiced correct forest management and fire prevention techniques over the past decade.

At the very least, had cattle grazing been permitted in our forests, the undergrowth would not have been as thick and the fires would not have been as intense and have burnt for so long and the communities of the North-East Victoria would not have been confronted by a disaster of such sheer magnitude.

I anticipate that with good rains this country will rejuvenate very quickly. Our land is very resilient and not as fragile as the green movement purports. Locals of the North-East have always battled on in the face of adversity and I have no doubt that our farmers who have been farming this land for generations, will continue to do so.

Yours sincerely



IAN ROPER